

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

**NICHOLE HAWKINS,**  
**Plaintiff**

**vs.**

**SUPERINTENDENT JOYCE WILKES, et al,**  
**Defendants.**

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**C.A.No. 14-279ERIE**

**District Judge Rothstein**  
**Magistrate Judge Baxter**

**MAGISTRATE JUDGE'S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

**I. RECOMMENDATION**

It is respectfully recommended that Defendants' motion to dismiss [ECF No. 32] be granted. The Clerk of Courts should be directed to close this case.

**II. REPORT**

**A. Relevant Procedural History**

Plaintiff, a state inmate acting *pro se*, initiated this civil rights action on November 6, 2014. As Defendants to this action, Plaintiff originally named: Superintendent Joyce Wilkes, Physician's Assistant Miranda Doering<sup>1</sup>, Physician's Assistant Ms. Hornaman, and Dr. Richard Learn. Plaintiff has voluntarily withdrawn her claims against Wilkes and Learn and they have been dismissed from this lawsuit.

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<sup>1</sup> Doering is spelled several different ways throughout the parties' filings. This Court will use the spelling as listed on the docket.

Plaintiff claims that Defendants Doering and Hornaman violated her Eighth Amendment rights regarding the medical services provided to her while she was an inmate incarcerated at SCI Cambridge Springs. Plaintiff alleges that during a vaginal examination, Hornaman used a large speculum despite Plaintiff's request for a smaller instrument. Plaintiff claims that Hornaman did this vindictively to cause her pain. As to Doering, Plaintiff avers that she repeatedly refused to refer Plaintiff to a dermatologist and after a "telemedicine" referral was eventually conducted, Doering interfered with this appointment. Additionally, Plaintiff alleges that Doering refused to order an ophthalmology consultation and improperly gave Plaintiff eye drops for an optical condition. Plaintiff developed an eye infection in both eyes which necessitated hospitalization.

In response to the complaint, Defendants have filed a motion to dismiss. ECF No. 32. Plaintiff has filed a brief in opposition. ECF No. 52. The present motion is ripe for disposition by this Court.

## **B. Standards of Review**

### **1) *Pro Se* Litigants**

*Pro se* pleadings, "however inartfully pleaded," must be held to "less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers." Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520-521 (1972). If the court can reasonably read pleadings to state a valid claim on which the litigant could prevail, it should do so despite failure to cite proper legal authority, confusion of legal theories, poor syntax and sentence construction, or litigant's unfamiliarity with pleading requirements. Boag v. MacDougall, 454 U.S. 364 (1982); United States ex rel. Montgomery v. Bierley, 141 F.2d 552,

555 (3d Cir. 1969) (petition prepared by a prisoner may be inartfully drawn and should be read “with a measure of tolerance”); Smith v. U.S. District Court, 956 F.2d 295 (D.C.Cir. 1992); Freeman v. Dep’t of Corrections, 949 F.2d 360 (10th Cir. 1991). Under our liberal pleading rules, during the initial stages of litigation, a district court should construe all allegations in a complaint in favor of the complainant. Gibbs v. Roman, 116 F.3d 83 (3d Cir. 1997). See, e.g., Nami v. Fauver, 82 F.3d 63, 65 (3d Cir. 1996) (discussing Fed.R.Civ.P. 12(b)(6) standard); Markowitz v. Northeast Land Co., 906 F.2d 100, 103 (3d Cir. 1990) (same). Because Plaintiff is a *pro se* litigant, this Court may consider facts and make inferences where it is appropriate.

## **2) Motion to dismiss pursuant to Rule 12(b)(6)**

A motion to dismiss filed pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) must be viewed in the light most favorable to the plaintiff and all the well-pleaded allegations of the complaint must be accepted as true. Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 93-94 (2007). A complaint must be dismissed pursuant to Rule 12 (b)(6) if it does not allege “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” Twombly, 550 U.S. at 570 (rejecting the traditional 12 (b)(6) standard set forth in Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41 (1957)). See also Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662 (2009) (specifically applying Twombly analysis beyond the context of the Sherman Act).

A Court need not accept inferences drawn by a plaintiff if they are unsupported by the facts as set forth in the complaint. See California Pub. Employee Ret. Sys. v. The Chubb Corp., 394 F.3d 126, 143 (3d Cir. 2004) citing Morse v. Lower Merion Sch. Dist., 132 F.3d 902, 906 (3d Cir. 1997). Nor must the Court accept legal conclusions set forth as factual allegations. Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555, citing Papasan v. Allain, 478 U.S. 265, 286 (1986). See also

McTernan v. City of York, Pennsylvania, 577 F.3d 521, 531 (3d Cir. 2009) (“The tenet that a court must accept as true all of the allegations contained in a complaint is inapplicable to legal conclusions.”). A plaintiff’s factual allegations “must be enough to raise a right to relief above the speculative level.” Twombly, 550 U.S. at 556, citing 5 C. Wright & A. Miller, Federal Practice and Procedure § 1216, pp. 235-236 (3d ed. 2004). Although the United States Supreme Court does “not require heightened fact pleading of specifics, [the Court does require] enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” Id. at 570.

In other words, at the motion to dismiss stage, a plaintiff is “required to make a ‘showing’ rather than a blanket assertion of an entitlement to relief.” Smith v. Sullivan, 2008 WL 482469, at \*1 (D. Del.) quoting Phillips v. County of Allegheny, 515 F.3d 224, 231 (3d Cir. 2008). “This ‘does not impose a probability requirement at the pleading stage,’ but instead ‘simply calls for enough facts to raise a reasonable expectation that discovery will reveal evidence of’ the necessary element.” Phillips, 515 F.3d at 234, quoting Twombly, 550 U.S. at 556 n.3.

The Third Circuit has expounded on the Twombly/Iqbal line of cases:

To determine the sufficiency of a complaint under Twombly and Iqbal, we must take the following three steps:

First, the court must ‘tak[e] note of the elements a plaintiff must plead to state a claim.’ Second, the court should identify allegations that, ‘because they are no more than conclusions, are not entitled to the assumption of truth.’ Finally, ‘where there are well-pleaded factual allegations, a court should assume their veracity and then determine whether they plausibly give rise to an entitlement for relief.’

Burtch v. Milberg Factors, Inc., 662 F.3d 212, 221 (3d Cir. 2011) quoting Santiago v.

Warminster Twp., 629 F.3d 121, 130 (3d Cir. 2010).

## **C. The Prison Litigation Reform Act**

### **1) The Exhaustion Requirement**

Defendants move to dismiss the claim against them based upon Plaintiff's failure to exhaust her administrative remedies in accordance with the requirements of the Prison Litigation Reform Act, 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a), which provides:

no action shall be brought with respect to prison conditions under section 1983 of this title ... by a prisoner confined in any jail, prisons, or other correctional facility until such administrative remedies as are available are exhausted.

Id. The exhaustion requirement is not a technicality, rather it is federal law which federal district courts are required to follow. Nyhuis v. Reno, 204 F.3d 65, 73 (3d Cir. 2000) (by using language "no action shall be brought," Congress has "clearly required exhaustion").

The PLRA's exhaustion requirement "is a non-jurisdictional prerequisite." Small v. Camden County, 728 F.3d 265, 270 n.3 (3d Cir. 2013). The requirement that an inmate exhaust administrative remedies applies to all inmate suits regarding prison life, including those that involve general circumstances as well as particular episodes. Porter v. Nussle, 534 U.S. 516 (2002); Cutter v. Wilkinson, 544 U.S. 709, 723 n.12 (2005) (noting that the PLRA requires that "a prisoner may not sue under RLUIPA without first exhausting all available administrative remedies."); Concepcion v. Morton, 306 F.3d 1347 (3d Cir. 2002) (for history of exhaustion requirement).

The PLRA also requires "proper exhaustion" meaning that a prisoner must complete the administrative review process in accordance with the applicable procedural rules of that grievance system. Woodford v. Ngo, 548 U.S. 81, 87-91 (2006) ("Proper exhaustion demands compliance with an agency's deadlines and other critical procedural rules ..."). Importantly, the

exhaustion requirement may not be satisfied “by filing an untimely or otherwise procedurally defective ... appeal.” Id. at 83.<sup>2</sup>

So then, no analysis of exhaustion may be made absent an understanding of the administrative process available to state inmates. “Compliance with prison grievance procedures, therefore, is all that is required by the PLRA to ‘properly exhaust.’ The level of detail necessary in a grievance to comply with the grievance procedures will vary from system to system and claim to claim, but it is the prison’s requirements, and not the PLRA, that define the boundaries of proper exhaustion.” Jones v. Bock, 549 U.S. at 218. See also Spruill v. Gillis, 372 F.3d 218, 231 (3d Cir. 2004) (having concluded that the PLRA includes a procedural default component, the Court then indicated that “prison grievance procedures supply the yardstick for measuring procedural default.”).

## **2) The Administrative Process Available to State Inmates**

The DC-ADM 804 grievance system, available to state prisoners, consists of three separate stages. First, the prisoner is required to timely submit a written grievance for review by the facility manager or the regional grievance coordinator within fifteen days of the incident, who responds in writing within ten business days. Second, the inmate must timely submit a written appeal to intermediate review within ten working days, and again the inmate receives a

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<sup>2</sup> See also Spruill v. Gillis, 372 F.3d 218, 228-29 (3d Cir. 2004) (utilizing a procedural default analysis to reach the same conclusion) (“Based on our earlier discussion of the PLRA’s legislative history, [...] Congress seems to have had three interrelated objectives relevant to our inquiry here: (1) to return control of the inmate grievance process to prison administrators; (2) to encourage development of an administrative record, and perhaps settlements, within the inmate grievance process; and (3) to reduce the burden on the federal courts by erecting barriers to frivolous prisoner lawsuits.”).

written response within ten working days. Finally, the inmate must submit a timely appeal to the Central Office Review Committee, also known as the Secretary's Office of Inmate Grievances and Appeals ("SOIGA"), within fifteen working days, and the inmate will receive a final determination in writing within thirty days. See Booth v. Churner, 206 F.3d 289, 293 n.2 (3d Cir. 1997), aff'd, 532 U.S. 731 (2001).

### **3) Analysis of Plaintiff's use of the administrative remedy process**

In support of their motion to dismiss, Defendants have provided Plaintiff's grievance file maintained by the SOIGA, which is the final level of administrative review.

Plaintiff's grievance file at that office contains one appeal and that grievance and appeal are unrelated to the subject matter of this case. ECF No. 33-1; ECF No. 33-2. As such, Plaintiff has failed to fully exhaust any of her medical claims that form the basis of this lawsuit.

Accordingly, the motion to dismiss should be granted.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

It is respectfully recommended that Defendants' motion to dismiss [ECF No. 32] be granted. The Clerk of Courts should be directed to close this case.

In accordance with 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1) and Fed.R.Civ.P. 72, the parties must seek review by the district court by filing Objections to the Report and Recommendation within fourteen (14) days of the filing of this Report and Recommendation. Any party opposing the objections shall have fourteen (14) days from the date of service of Objections to respond

thereto. See Fed.R.Civ.P. 72(b)(2). Failure to file timely objections may constitute a waiver of appellate rights. See Brightwell v. Lehman, 637 F.3d 187, 194 n.7 (3d Cir. 2011); Nara v. Frank, 488 F.3d 187 (3d Cir. 2007).

/s/ Susan Paradise Baxter  
SUSAN PARADISE BAXTER  
United States Magistrate Judge

Dated: January 12, 2016